

VZCZCXRO0105
OO RUEHDT RUEHPB
DE RUEHJA #1653/01 2751245
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 021245Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3463
INFO RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 001653

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EAP/RSP
NSC FOR D. WALTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: NEW INDONESIAN PARLIAMENT FACES HIGH EXPECTATIONS

REF: JAKARTA 1597 AND PREVIOUS

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: With President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) Democratic Party (PD) and its coalition partners firmly in control of the newly inaugurated parliament, President Yudhoyono has the consensus government he's been seeking. Given the President's solid majority, many analysts expect that he will be able to easily achieve his legislative goals. Some political pundits have expressed concerns that the new legislature may be too compliant, while others argue that this parliament will not be a rubber stamp for SBY. 75 percent of the incoming MPs are first time members, who are younger and better educated than their predecessors. Although the devastating September 30 earthquake in Sumatra dampened the October 1 inauguration ceremonies, there was nonetheless a sense of high expectations as the new legislators stepped in to improve the image and performance of Parliament. END SUMMARY.

NEW LEGISLATURE INAUGURATED

12. (U) On October 1 and 2, the new members of the Indonesian legislature were sworn into office for a five year term of office. The legislature is divided into three distinct bodies: the People's Representative Assembly (DPR), the Regional Representatives Assembly (DPD), and the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR). The MPR is comprised of the DPR and the DPD. The DPR has 560 members (10 more than in 2004 due to the creation of new regions) and is the more powerful of the two houses since its members draft and pass laws in conjunction with the executive branch. The DPD has 132 members, four from each of the 33 provinces, and does not create or vote on legislation. It provides consultations on legislation dealing with regional issues.

FRESH FACES: A BRAND NEW PARLIAMENT

13. (U) About 75 percent of the DPR are first time members. It is expected that this DPR will be more responsive to constituents' concerns, because for the first time voters directly elected their representatives. (Note: In the past political parties were on the ballot rather than candidates.) According to the Indonesian Parliamentary Watchdog Group (Formappi), the members are younger and more educated than the 2004 DPR--91 percent of the members are university-educated as compared to 80 percent in 2004). There are more women -- 17 percent, up from 11 percent in 12004. The majority of the members are business people (about 46 percent), academics, and professionals. A number of parties ran actors and models, with no political or legislative experience, as candidates.

14. (SBU) The most crucial difference between this Parliament

and its predecessor is that due to the Democratic Party's dominance, this DPR is expected to be more supportive of the government's policies. In the outgoing parliament the Democratic Party controlled only 10 percent of the seats compared to nearly 30 percent now (168 of the 560 seats). With its coalition partners, the four largest Islamic-oriented parties, PD controls 56 percent of the seats. Speculation abounds about whether the current opposition parties, Golkar and PDI-P, will join the ruling coalition. If they do, the two small unaligned parties will be virtually powerless. With no effective opposition, some analysts are concerned that there may be a movement back to the authoritarian rule of the Suharto regime. On the other hand, given the make up of the incoming MPs, most agree that this Parliament will not be a rubber stamp for SBY's proposals.

¶5. (SBU) The outgoing 2004 DPR, the second democratically elected Parliament in Indonesian history, limped to a finish September 30. The press and NGOs have criticized the DPR for only reaching 25 percent of its targeted legislative output and for passing a spate of half-baked laws in poorly attended sessions in its final days. Many previous laws were struck down by the Constitutional Court and observers expect some of the new last-minute laws to face the same fate. Allegations of misdoing also plagued the 2004 DPR. At a September 30 farewell dinner for the outgoing DPR members, a participant noted with relief that "at least we are finishing without any scandals-- no pending investigations by the corruption commission." During the previous legislative session, nine

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DPR members were convicted of graft and several others were investigated. In 2009, Transparency International Indonesia ranked the DPR as the most corrupt institution in Indonesia. Indo Barometer, a polling agency, indicated that only 51 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the DPR but 90 percent were happy with President Yudhoyono.

NEW HOUSE FACES HIGH EXPECTATIONS

¶7. (SBU) Expectations are high that the new, well educated legislators will improve the image and performance of the DPR as an institution. It remains to be seen however, whether the new members will fall victim to the culture of money politics. Many of incoming members paid dearly for their campaigns and, for some, the temptation to recoup those expenses may be tempting. Political leadership and structures in the legislature will be determined in the coming weeks. Many are now waiting for the new slate of ministers to be announced as parties trade political support for leadership positions.

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